

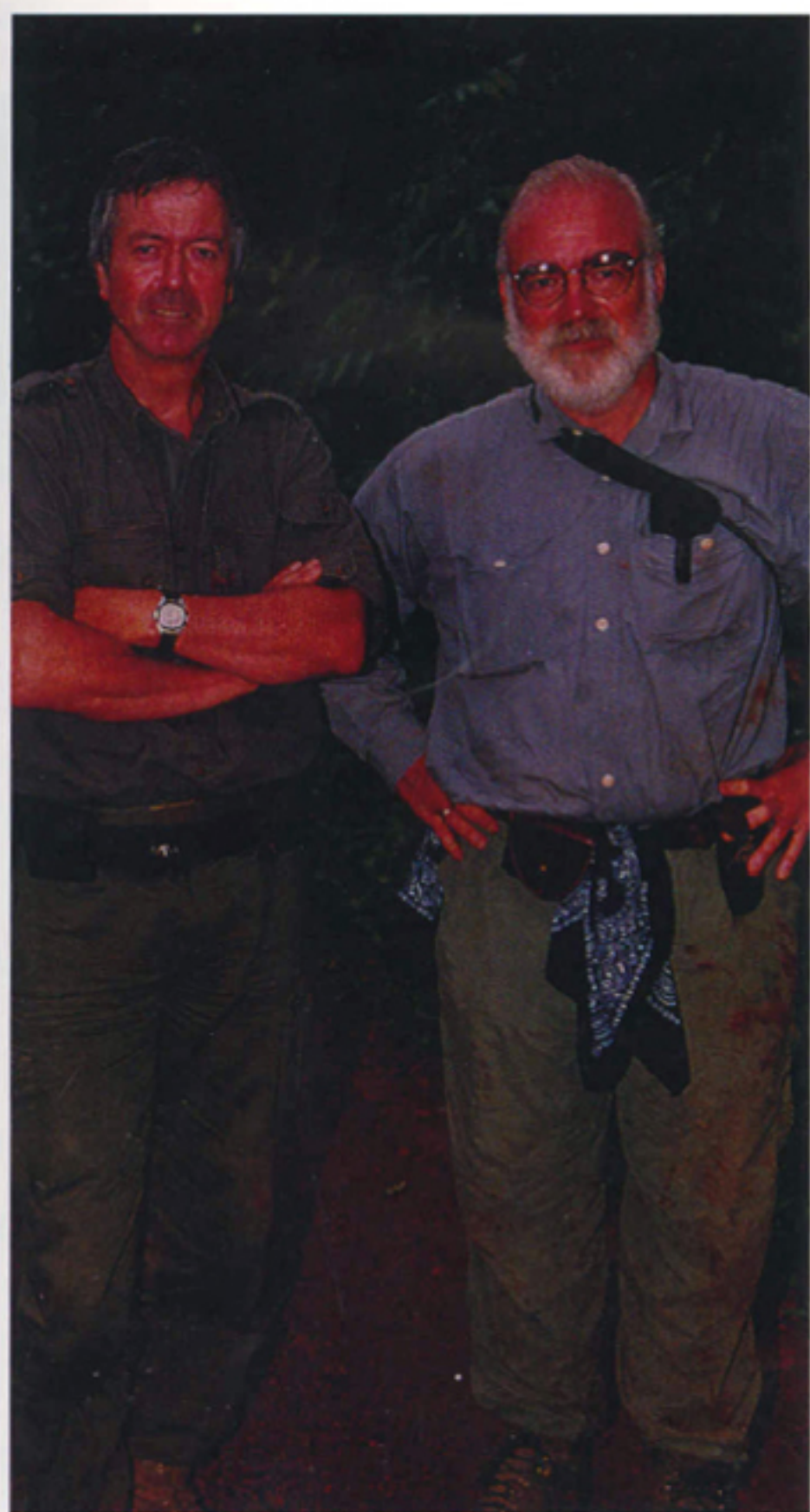


# Rumble in the Jungle

*There were clearings through the forest and we walked along the edge looking for buffalo - even sitatunga - that might be out in the "open."*

*Dawn crept over the rain forest of the Baka people in southeast Cameroon much as it had the previous ten days, darkness giving way slowly to reveal low, grey, heavy clouds just above the tops of the 300-foot tall trees.*

**By Chris Storm**



*PH Rudy Lubin and hunter Chris Storm at the end of a hard and satisfying day.*

**T**endrils of mist drifted upwards looking like lost souls wending their way to heaven. The forest at this hour was still dark, soft, and wet from the night's rain. It would be an hour before it would be light enough to follow a trail in the deep, triple-canopy forest. By noon, the temperature would be 95 degrees, the humidity a stifling 95 per cent. Beautiful though it is, the rain forest is a hard place.

Two days before, PH Rudy Lubin and I had cut the tracks of three forest buffalo – the reclusive, 800-pound African buff with the reputation of being among the most aggressive on a continent populated with aggressive animals. Everything I'd read led me to believe this animal would charge on sight and could be a challenge to stop. Typically, they are encountered in the thickest parts of the forest where the visibility ranges from several to 15 metres. Only occasionally does the hunter find them in a 40- or 50-metre-wide clearing.

Our hunting party, consisting of five native Pygmies of the Baka tribe, their five mongrel dogs, Rudy and me, set out on the spoor of two cows and one bull. On a hunt like this, the Pygmies follow the track, sometimes in single file following easily along, other times casting about to recover the spoor when it has been

lost. As with most African hunters, their tracking skills are extraordinary, able to read signs on either rock-hard or leafy surfaces that look untouched to my uneducated eyes. The dogs are along only to bay and hold the animal once the Pygmies get in close – 10 to 15 metres close. Only later in the day as we closed the last few metres would I understand why it was necessary to hold the animal.

It seems everything in Africa sticks, cuts or bites. There are plenty of all three in the rain forest. As we walked in file, the first three Pygmies used their razor-edged machetes to open the way. Rudy was in front of me using his small gardening clippers to improve the job. I still spent much of my time freeing myself from the fishhook-like "wait-a-bit" thorns and trying to keep up.

Fifteen minutes into every walk, I looked as if I'd been swimming. I was completely soaked. My glasses fogged to the point I hunted without them, and adjusted the focus on my scope to compensate.

That day we followed the track three hours before the head tracker stopped to listen, his leg poised in mid-air like a fine pointer. Suddenly one dog began to bark madly, the rest quickly joining in. I stumbled forward 10 metres to find myself on the edge of a small clearing in the jungle filled





*The mineral-rich openings in the forest are called 'bey' and anything from bongos to buffaloes and elephants congregate in beys.*

with shoulder-high grass. It was impossible to see and identify my quarry.

Rudy and I eased into the clearing to try to identify the animal the dogs had put at bay. We could see the tops of the grass moving just ahead and advanced towards the commotion.

Suddenly a dog appeared, upside down, slowly flipping above the top of the grass. Then a second drifted up, slowly rolled over like a miniature acrobat and dropped back into the long grass. The bayed buffalo was hooking and throwing the dogs as they nipped and yelped at it. We had to know if it was the bull or one of the cows. And I had to have half a clear shot. It was time to close the distance.

The fight was drifting across the clearing, so we moved to the left to get in front of the ruckus. Suddenly a cow buffalo appeared in an open spot with a dog on her forehead between her sickle-sharp horns. I had to hold fire. The bull and the other cow had escaped and by now were long gone.

When hunting dangerous game, there are two rules: Never, ever, turn your back to the animal; and never, ever, run.

Theodore, the Pygmy who was standing beside me, broke both rules and ran for cover. That caught the cow's eye as she slid



*This was one of the "better" looking of the small pack of skinny, scarred hunting dogs that accompanied our Pygmy trackers.*



*PH Rudy Lubin, Chris Storm and the hunting team at the end of a long track through the forest.*

to a stop and glared at me from a range of five metres. I told Rudy "Uh oh! She's seen us," as my Model 70 came up and the safety snicked off. Just then, Champion, the lead mongrel, nipped our antagonist in the heel, drawing her immediate attention, giving Rudy and me a graceful way out. We gratefully accepted and backed slowly into the forest and cover.

Our men somehow recovered their dogs, and we left the exhausted cow to her own grumbling devices as she parted company in search of her companions.

As we started our three-hour hike back to the truck, the rains came. Here, the rain is bathwater-warm and offers no refreshment at all. I knew the rifle would require immediate attention when I got back to camp. On the way back, Dieudonné (French for "God-given"), one of our trackers, offered to carry my rifle, as I was obviously not used to the humidity. The difference in weight and ease of passage was great, but I still had to fight through the clinging vines and thorns. Sleep came easily that night.

Reliving this unique experience occupied my mind until we were back on today's

buffalo tracks. They were obviously fresh, even to the eye of a novice. Again, we had cut the trail of two cows and a bull, but what bull! His track was huge, almost Cape buffalo huge. We had to follow them.

As we entered the underbrush, I once again offered my rifle to Dieudonné. He shook his head and said, "*Tiens, Patron. Il est près d'ici.*" (Keep it boss. He's quite near). He bent to show me the mud that had scraped off the side of one of the animals as it passed through the knife-edged elephant grass. It was still almost liquid. We were definitely not far behind.

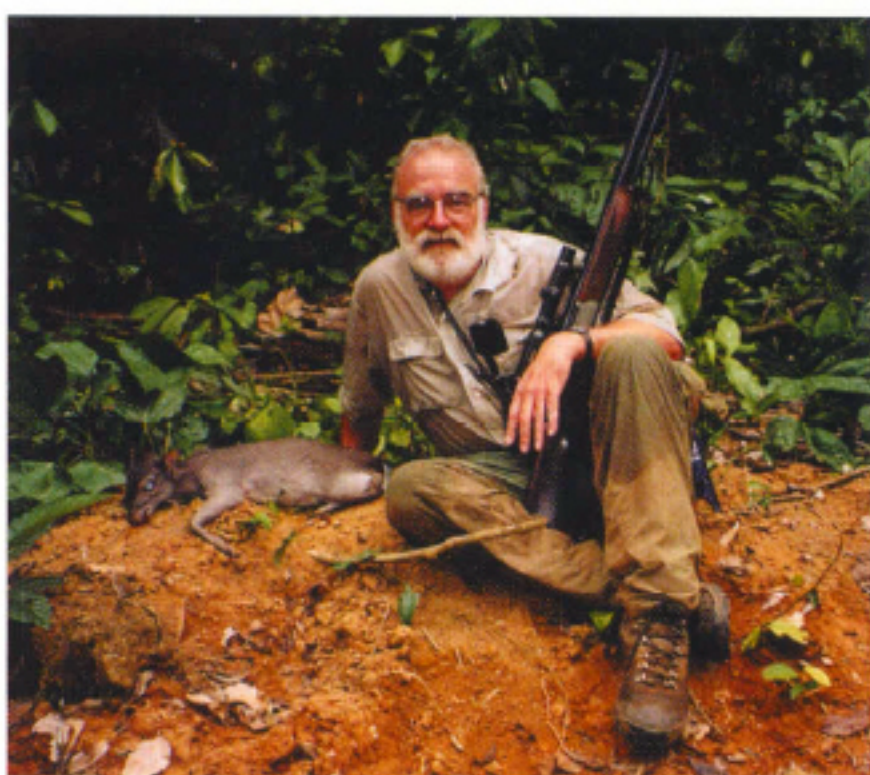
We took our positions and began to thread our way through the close underbrush. Fifteen minutes into the track, a dog gave a sharp, but tentative yip. We heard another bark, then another, and then several as the other dogs closed in. The buffalo had lain down in the thickest part of the bush and were sleeping. As the dogs closed, we heard the heavy grunt of the bull. The trackers urged us forward, but we had to fight the vines and thorns for each foot.

Suddenly, all hell broke loose just 15 or 20 metres in front of us. The dogs and buffalo were mixing it up. They began to yelp as if





*One of the more unpleasant inhabitants of the forest was this extraordinary rhinoceros viper that moved like a huge caterpillar crossing the road.*



*The blue duiker is the smallest and most common of the forest duikers. We hunted this one by "calling" them by the Pygmies imitating their "distress signal." A good PH will make sure you only shoot a male specimen.*



*My fine bongo, which we took by fair-chase tracking on foot - with a little help from our Pygmy trackers and dogs.*



*Huge roads are being cut through the pristine equatorial forests of Africa. If the short-term effects on hunting are good, the long-term ones are frightening to contemplate.*

they were being hooked or hit by the buffalo. Again, we tried to rush to the scene, feeling as if we were running underwater.

Just as I broke free from the hold of the brush, a shrill scream - like a very angry woman - stopped us all in our tracks. It became deathly quiet for several seconds, and then four or five other screams shook the forest. The dogs were barking, the buffalo were grunting and snorting, and the family group of gorillas into which our little melee had stumbled was venting their outrage and fear. The females and their young were surprised, frightened, and screaming reflexively to scare away the unwanted intruders. The cacophony was intense and awesome.

Just then, I heard the rapid-fire pounding of the silverback male as he beat his knuckles on his rock-hard chest. It sounded like a trip hammer as he pounded away, his heavy deep bellow shaking the jungle just 10 metres from where I stood. I still couldn't see a thing, but I could hear what had to be a doozy of a fight.

As I looked around to take stock of my surroundings and ensure nothing was behind me, I noticed our Pygmies had silently vanished, seemingly evaporated into thin air. All African trackers seem to have this ability to disappear at a moment's notice when necessary. I was quite impressed - and a bit jealous.

I glanced at Rudy, the obvious question on my face. He put his finger to his lips and gave me the universal sign to "Be Quiet!" No problem. I quietly flipped off my safety and tried to become invisible.

The fight seemed to be moving across our path from right to left. Things seemed to be settling down when one of the dogs loosed a blood-curdling scream. It had either been grabbed and thrown or swatted hard by one of the gorillas. Just then, another of the dogs broke from cover, seeking shelter behind us. As the second and third dog came to us, we frantically

tried to shoo them away so they wouldn't bring something unwanted into our laps.

It would have been dandy if the buffalo had been chasing them; we could shoot it out with them. But the buff had cleared out, and the fight now was with the hysterically upset gorillas. I had no desire to meet any of them at hand-shaking range.

The troupe must have felt the same because the screaming and yelling of gorilla obscenities began to move away from us. I could still hear the silverback beating his chest, proclaiming his territory and supremacy as they melted into the forest in search of quieter surroundings.

Now that the danger was past, our diminutive friends magically reappeared. Together we could all feel quite brave and indignant that the gorillas had ruined our buffalo hunt. They, in turn, were surely congratulating themselves on having thoroughly intimidated the bothersome dogs, humans and buffalos that had invaded their serene morning.

A short, quiet stroll brought us back to the logging road where we first started this adventure. Sadly, I had no more time to hunt forest buffalo and would leave without that species. However, the memories of these hunts are so vivid, I don't need the physical trophy. In fact, I am just as happy that those buffalo and the gorillas that rescued them that day, are still there, silently slipping through the beautiful, humid, thick, rain forest, awaiting my return.

*An aspiring Hemingway look-alike, Texas hunter Chris Storm earned his first BB-gun at age four and took his first trophy - an 8-point whitetail - at age 14. An avid North American hunter, Chris has, since 1985 hunted Africa eleven times, taking the Big Five and 26 of SCI's Africa 27, "missing, literally, only a sitatunga." He and his lovely Belgian wife, Grite, have six children and two grandchildren between them - and still find time to hunt. 🌿*